

Exhibit No. 3
Date 2/11/09
Bill No. SB 394

Montana Women Vote Opposition Testimony to SB 394

February 11th, 2009

Member of the Senate State Administration Committee:

My name is Alysha Goheen Jannotta and I am testifying in opposition to SB 394. I represent Montana Women Vote, a coalition of women's organization that work statewide to educate and mobilize low-income women to vote. In the past three election cycles we have registered over 12,000 Montana voters in our effort to include unlikely voters in the democratic process. We, of course, are particularly concerned about how any change to voting law could affect unlikely voters.

Montana Women Vote sees potential advantages to vote by mail and has had success in helping voters utilize the absentee voting process. Yet we have concerns about how an all mail ballot election would affect those voters who move frequently, particularly low-income voters, and younger voters. We are also deeply troubled by the outcry of Native communities, about how this system could affect voters in communities with less reliable mail systems. In addition we are concerned by how the cost and availability of postage could disproportionately affect already disenfranchised voters.

During the Interim Committee meetings to study vote by mail, I drove to Helena many times and participated in many hours of meetings and email exchanges where we brought up these issues. Montana Women Vote along with other groups represented here today also made suggestions of how we might work together to draft legislation to include plans to study and address these concerns. Unfortunately none of this process is reflected and none of these concerns are addressed in SB 394.

If we are moving to fundamentally change our voting system, even at just the county level, it is critical that we do so in a careful, thoughtful manner. We need to collect and evaluate data on outcomes and make accommodations to insure that going to an all vote by mail system increases accessibility to voting, not limits it. SB 394 seems to be a "just go for it" piecemeal approach that alters our fundamental right as citizens to vote. The potential money saved is not enough to offset the cost of disenfranchising voters. If we are to move to all mail ballots in our state we need to do so in a coordinated, well-planned, evaluative way – that takes into consideration voters in addition to budgets. That is why I urge you to please vote "no" on SB 394. I am available for questions if needed.

Thank you for you time,

Alysha Goheen Jannotta
Outreach Director
Montana Women Vote
(405) 360-7512